‘Exile Narratives’ of Kashmiri Pandits: A Study with Reference to Edward Said’s Theory of Exile

SYNOPSIS
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Ah! Will not the flower bloom in the garden as in the past?

Does not the bulbul perch on the window-sill to sing, as in the past?...

Do you think we'll never come together, as in the past?

(Brij Nath 'Betaab'1-18)

Macquarie Australian Dictionary (1981) defines the state of exile as, "a prolonged separation from one's country or home as by stress or circumstances" (1). According to The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary (2015), "a condition of physically being distanced from one's motherland is described as an exile. The term includes both forced migrations, say during wartime, as well as voluntary migrations" (75). In Sanskrit, exile means 'life in the woods' and in common parlance, exile is often termed as banishment where an individual is expelled from his/her native land. In Sanskrit, exile means 'life in the woods'.

Exile has been one of the oldest forms of displacements in human history where individuals or groups moved away from their places of origin for various reasons- war, oppression, crop failure, predators etc. One encounters descriptions of exilic conditions in the Indian epics The *Ramayana* and The *Mahabharata*, where the prince was forced to spend his life in the woods. Both epics portray how the exile period was filled with despair, suffering and deprivation. The gloating of the enemies further augmented the anguish and distress. The fall of Adam and Eve may also be considered a form of exile. They lived in their state of innocence with God in the Garden of Eden but the serpent tempted them to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil which was forbidden by God. This

resulted in the Fall of Adam and Eve, who were exiled from the Garden of Eden by God. *"*Therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man*"* (Genesis 3:23-24).

An exilic life becomes a constrained life with sudden shift from 'home to homelessness', from 'secured life amidst familiar surroundings to an insecure life with temporary dwelling' followed by imposed affiliations and new loyalties. The strong political undercurrents running through the term exile never go unnoticed. It is a life of compulsion, not of choice. An exiled leads as his own philosophic, cultural and religious beliefs are fractured.

The feelings of disintegration and displacement are experienced by expatriates also, but it needs a mention here that expatriation is voluntary migration in quest of a better life and better economic conditions, whereas exilic condition is a forced migration. Examining the postcard from his homeland Kashmir, Aga Shahid Ali captures the pathos of exile in his "Postcard from Kashmir":

> The half inch in my hand…
>
> This is the closest
>
> I'll never be to home (753)

The phenomenon of exile acquired greater socio-political dimensions in the twentieth century which witnessed several harrowing instances of displacements and dispersal of populations across the globe due to political upheavals. To name a few major

displacements, World War I, World War II, Cold War, Partition of India and Pakistan are the ones from the recent past.

The political partition of India in 1947 caused one of the most distressing human upheavals in the world history. Never before in the history, had so many people exchanged their native lands so reluctantly and so forcefully. About twelve million people were expelled from their own homes and were coerced to move to such a place which they did not know of. The partition between India and Pakistan did not just result in geographical separation, but also brought loss of loved ones, grief, pain, trauma and fear. Many people were brutally killed and many died from malnutrition and contagious diseases. Urvashi Butalia, in her book, *The Other Side of Silence* writes, "about 75000 women were abducted and raped by men of other religion and sometimes by men of their own religion. Thousands of families were divided, homes were destroyed, crops left to rot, villages abandoned" (3).

Kashmir, 'Paradise on Earth' was once a state where two communities (Hindus and Muslims) lived peacefully in harmony and brotherhood, but soon it became a place of militancy and terrorism. Since 1947, neither India nor Pakistan has reached consensus on an argument for the territory of Kashmir. This conflict is an outgrowth of colonialism. Post-partition, the population of Kashmir was majority Muslims but with a Hindu ruler, Hari Singh, who was oppressive. He did not want to side with either India or Pakistan but when Kashmir was invaded; Indian army came to Kashmir's rescue. It was believed that the government of Pakistan had supported the invasion. Later, his decision to make Kashmir, a part of India received a seething criticism from Pakistan. In the wake of these developments it was decided to make Kashmir an autonomous state. In 1949, Article 370 was drafted granting special autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Many governing

powers were given to the people of Kashmir, except powers such as defense, currency, communications and foreign exchange. A separate constitution was drafted for Kashmir with its own flag. The Kashmiri assembly was allowed to decide as to which Indian laws should apply to Kashmir. However, too much autonomy became a problem for the central government. In 1953, Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India removed the Prime Minister of Kashmir and whittled down Article 370, limiting Kashmiri autonomy. Now, the central government became the cause of concern for Kashmiris and they forgot the oppression of the earlier ruler, Hari Singh. The tension further increased as clashes triggered between the governments of India and Pakistan as to who should exercise control over the land of Kashmir. The conditions worsened in 1990 when Kashmiri Pandits were forced by the Islamic militants to leave their homes forever. There was violence everywhere. People were brutally killed, Pandit women were raped, children were abducted and were forced to convert themselves to Islam. According to Islamic militants, they were 'cleansing' out the dirt from the beautiful valley of Kashmir. Pandits, who owned lands in Kashmir were made to live in refugee camps in Jammu where living conditions were beyond imagination.

Literature reflects life in its different forms and colours. Literature a recreation of reality, has always played an important role in the elevation of man and reformation of society. It allows people to look back at their memories, to relive their experiences, whether good or bad and also visualize the life to come. A literary work is an embodiment of past, present and future.The Kashmiri Pandits, blessed with creative genius, pours out their anguish in their literary creations. Artistic expression becomes the only way out, like a vent

where the exiled writer can rescue himself from the tautness of the entrapped strings. It is through the writings and the words that a writer chooses to describe his condition.

Prominent in exile literature are the works of writers who were compelled to flee their countries by oppressive regimes. Two Russian writers, Maxim Gorky and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn were the victims of political exile. One of the Roman victims of exile was the poet, Ovid. He was forced to leave Rome and settle in the city of Tomis on the Black Sea, now Constanta. His famous poems during his exile were *Tristia* and *The Black Sea Letters* written after 8 A.D. The First World War witnessed a large exodus of writers who felt that they could not write during the wartime as they could previously write. The Second World War saw the Nazi's oppression towards the Jews. Thomas Mann wrote from his refuge in Chicago to Hermann Hesse in Germany about the forced dispersal and also mentioned that Europe would be a different place to live after the war. As it turned out, the whole world became a different place as soon as the bombs blew Hiroshima. However, exilic conditions could not enchain their artistic freedom; their narratives reflected their painful exodus. They always felt that it was their right to be in their homeland, yet those who were privileged to return home, were often disappointed with the changes. There were no like-minded people around them. 'Once-an-exile' becomes 'forever-an-exile' and the works of such writers show the enthusiasm of their restlessness.

Within Postcolonial Studies, exiled writers, including migrants, have drawn the attention of researchers worldwide for their reflections on exile, separation from motherland, cultural roots and language. Edward Wadie Said (1935-2003) was one of the prominent and influential Arab American (Palestinian-born) scholar, well-known for advocating the role of intellectuals in society. He was a cultural critic whose major work

Orientalism was a critique of cultural representations- how the western world perceives the Orient. Being a Palestinian by birth, Said advocated the establishment of a Palestinian state to ensure equal political and human rights for the Palestinians in Israel, including the right to return to the homeland. The struggle between Israel and Palestine was one of the world's most intractable conflict which Said talked about. His idea of exile was concerned with Palestinian identity which was based on justice, equality, and reconciliation between the Arabs and Jewish. His Palestinian roots created a dichotomized voice which Said constantly attempted to negotiate. He wrote many books, articles and was a Palestinian activist who supported the Jews whom he called the community of suffering, who brought with them a heritage of great tragedy.

The theme of exile is central in Said's critical and scholarly works. Exile is a political condition that Said shows to be painful and unjust in the case of the Palestinian people who, according to Said, lived in a terrible state as exiles in their own native land. Said's memoir, *Out of Place (*1999*)* talks about the autobiographical roots of his interest in exile as both a political condition and a critical concept.

In the words of Wallace Stevens, "exile is a mind of winter in which the pathos of summer and autumn as much as the potential of spring are nearby but unobtainable" (148). Just like these seasons, the culture of an exile ceases to become a part of one particular society. People who are in exile are cognizant of more than one culture. Their identity is lost. The new environment becomes difficult to adapt. Thus, exile is never the state of being secure.

Edward Said writes, "exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience" (137). An exile's life is no more than efforts meant to overcome the sorrows of

estrangement. Modern western culture deals a lot with the work of exiles, émigrés and refugees. Critic George Steiner proposed the perspective thesis that a large corpus of twentieth century Western literature deals with literature by and about exiles i.e. "extraterritorial". He says, "It seems proper that those who create art in a civilization of quasi-barbarism which has made so many homeless should themselves be poets unhoused and wanderers across language. Eccentric, aloof, nostalgic, deliberately untimely" (137). The effects of exile are reflected on his writing. It comes as a liberating experience. Writing becomes a tool through which writers express their emotions, feelings, thoughts, ideas and their condition.

According to Said, exile can be comprehended neither on aesthetic level nor on humane level. It is all about the pain and anguish. It is a creation by humans for other humans which is horrendous like death and has torn millions of people from the nourishment of tradition, family, its roots and geography.

The proposed study endeavours to approach the selected writings of Kashmiri Pandits as 'exile narratives' and analyze them from socio-political and psychological perspectives with special reference to Edward Said's theory of exile and Edmund Wilson's Wound and the Bow thesis. Within the permissible time and space, the study would undertake an exhaustive study of T. N Dhar's *Under the Shadow of Militancy: The Diary of an Unknown Kashmiri* (diary), Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude(*novel), Suvir Kaul's *Of Gardens and Graves(*poems), Dr. K. L. Chowdhary's *Faith and Frenzy(*short stories), Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood* Clots(novel) and Arvind Gigoo, Adarsh Ajit and Shaleen Kumar Singh's *From Home to House*(Short stories and essays).

Under the rubric of diasporic studies, the theories of exile, expatriation, displacement and dislocation have been and are still being considerably explored but the predicament of exiled Kashmiri Pandits, which is different from those of diasporic individuals, still needs research exploration. Diasporic individuals experience social and cultural alienation while adapting to new society/ country, but nevertheless it is observed that second-generation migrants do not experience the same intense sense of alienation, having been born and adapted to the new culture. The exiled Kashmiri Pandits, under consideration in the proposed research work, have not been able to overcome the anguish of coerced displacement from their motherland, and even after years the wounds of exile are fresh and painful.

Tej Nath Dhar (b. 1944) was born in Kashmir. He re-settled in Gurgaon in 1990, where his friend resided. He shifted before the dire consequences in Kashmir prevailed in 1991. Although, he left home, the memories remained fresh. In an interview, he recalled his childhood incidents every single day after he re-located. He was disturbed by the political turmoil. What disturbed him even more was the apathy and ignorance of people in the rest of the country towards the atrocities heaped upon the dislocated natives.

Tej N. Dhar is a retired professor of English at Asmara University, North East Africa. He is best known for his *History-Fiction Interface in the Indian English Novel* (1999) and *Under the Shadow of Militancy: The Diary of an Unknown Kashmiri* (2002). The diary is a record of the outbreak of militancy, the uncertainty and insecurity faced by the Kashmiri Pandits during the period of 1990. The book is in a form of a diary kept by a Kashmiri Pandit from February to August in the year 1990 which fell into the hands of the author. The diary is a fictive tool that Dhar adopts to show the tragedy of the whole

community, through the voice of an individual. This book recreates and throws light on the lives of those Kashmiri's who suffered and were traumatized. The diary is highly sensitive, reflective, absorbing and thoughtful and it forces one to think of the terrible and gruesome exodus of the Pandits from their native land.

Siddhartha Gigoo (1974-) born in Srinagar, Kashmir, had to leave Kashmir due to armed insurgency and political turmoil, along with many others in 1990. He completed his studies from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. *The Garden of Solitude* (2010) is a novel, partly autobiographical in nature which focuses on the plight of Kashmiri Pandits who were forced to abandon their homes due to militancy. It is partly autobiographical because Gigoo himself was in such a state and he migrated from Kashmir because of political turmoil. Through the character of Sridar, which represents Gigoo in a way, he writes a story of pain, fear, struggles, misfortunes, atrocities and uprootedness of the Pandits. One is constantly aware that Gigoo talks about his misfortunes, about his own painful experiences and his own exile. Sridar, along with his family, moves to a migrant camp where he witnesses horrible situations, worse conditions of survival, where people are fighting for better living conditions and the old, on their death bed struggling to visit their 'home' just for one last time. In such horrible and alien surroundings, Sridar finds solace in what he writes. All his thoughts, his emotions and the agony of separation from his parental house are reflected in his writings. The novel begins with an emotional note, poignantly portraying the condition of exiled.

One cannot ignore the following poignant opening lines of Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood Clots* (2014).

> They found the old man dead in his torn tent, with a pack of chilled milk pressed against his right cheek. It was our first June in exile, and the heat felt like a blow in the back of the head. His neighbor, who discovered his lifeless body in the refugee camp, recalled later that he had found his Stewart Warner radio on playing an old Hindi song:
>
> Aadmi musafir hai,
>
> Aata hai, jaata hai (1)

Pandita, a victim of the exodus who, at a very young age of fourteen was forced to leave his home, wrote a powerful, deeply personal story. Hundreds of people were tortured and were forced to leave their own homes. Every Kashmiri who lived in Kashmir in the 1990's could easily tell about the horrors of that January when curfew would not relent for days. Pandita's father had built a new home using his wife's jewelry and his provident fund. He left no stone unturned in constructing and building his new home. He was forced to leave behind all his prized possessions- his land, his family, his friends, his faith and trust.

> …Well does life get any better
>
> More yesterday than today
>
> How I thought the sun would shine tomorrow
>
> But it rained… (Parikrama)

From Home to House (2015) is a collective writing (short stories, essays) about Kashmiri Pandits in exile edited by Arvind Gigoo, Shaleen Kumar Singh and Adarsh Ajit.

Arvind Gigoo was born in Srinagar, Kashmir in 1945. He was one amongst those who had to migrate in 1990 due to militancy in Kashmir. Shaleen Kumar Singh was born in Badaun, Uttar Pradesh in 1979. He is a poet, literary critic, reviewer, editor and a translator. Adarsh Ajit was born in Pulwama district in Kashmir in 1960. He is a poet, reviewer, columnist and translator. He has written many Urdu poems. 'From Home to House' is an anthology of short stories, writings and poems by Kashmiri Pandits who are living in the state of exile and are nostalgic about going back to their home. It is like a mirror to the reality of Kashmir and the troubles faced by the Pandits.

Dr. Kundan Lal Chowdhary, born in Srinagar, Kashmir, is a Medical graduate from Punjab University and a post graduate from Delhi University. He has written and published many articles on various subjects. *Of Gods, Men and Militants* was a famous book on poetry written by him, published in 2000. *Faith and Frenzy* is an anthology of short stories by Chowdhary which is a blend of both facts and fiction. The stories capture terror, politics, deceit, killings, fear, insecurity and mayhem into the lives of the people of Kashmir. In the anthology of stories, there are stories which showcase the changes in the lives of Kashmiri Pandits because of militancy, how the Pandits were forced into exodus where nothing was defined as to when they would return.

The story of Shyam Lal and his wife is the most tragic one where Shyam Lal is forcibly taken by the militants because they think that his sons are informers and hence enemies to the militants. He somehow, escapes the noose but is slashed by a knife repeatedly and is thrown into the river. These were the real life incidents which actually happened where people were killed mercilessly with no fault of theirs.

William Wordsworth, rightly, wrote in his *Lyrical Ballads* wrote, "poetry is a spontaneous overflow of emotions…recollected in tranquility" (qtd. in Gill 109). The study includes an analysis of poems because poems have immense power to express; they offer a rich repository of heightened feelings, desires and emotions. At the time of militancy in Kashmir, many people penned down their experiences and their feelings in the form of poems. They always have something important to say, in this case, it tells about the lives which people lived, the scenario in the face of political disruptions and violence. Here is an example of one of the translated poems in *Of Gardens and Graves,* "Corpse" by Shabir Azar which emphasizes the recurrent violence in the valley.

In the mirror of that lake,

What should I see…?

From its depths that stranger-like corpse stares

I have often thrown a stone—

I wished I smashed that mirror

Ripples formed, spread, dissipated…

If the corpse

Is in the lake

The lake too

Is in the corpse.

Or both are locked in drops of water (1-27).

The above poem is a reflection of the times and situation of Kashmir during and post 1990. It is a poem both compelling and powerful. The valley which was once a symbol of placid beauty is now floating with corpses. Kashmir, which was once a symbol of its

beauty, its people, its lakes has now been reconfigured by violence. The poem carries no peaceful resolution. With the help of such heart-wrenching poems, people at large voiced their opinions about the political crisis, the havoc which was created because of the insurgency. They spoke of loss, of violence, of killings, of betrayal, of leaving homes, of anger and of the ugliness of the time. One thing which is common in all the poems is the shared pain that they suffer because of the exile. There is no compensation for the pain and loss which they have suffered.

Suvir Kaul, Professor of English in University of Pennsylvania is best known for his three books, *Eighteenth-century British Literature and Postcolonial Studies* (2009), *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2001) *and Thomas Gray* and *Literary Authority: Ideology and Poetics in Eighteenth-Century England* 1992). Kaul, along with Javed Dar, a photojournalist at Xinhua News Agency in Srinagar wrote *Of Gardens and Graves*, published in 2015 which examines the situation of Kashmir through poetic expression (translations of poems written in Kashmiri) and essays in the year 1990. It talks about everyday life and the difficulties which were faced by Kashmiri Pandits. Kashmiri's suffered outside the valley as they did within. The politics of the militants hardened with time. The largest majority of the Kashmiri Pandits rebuilt their houses, their lives outside the valley, their language, and their cultural norms were now de-territorialized and were in a danger of dissolution. Life in Kashmir became very strange, like a schizophrenic, mix between both political and civil administration and the security forces. People had learned to fear the actions of both.

An exhaustive literature review reveals that for the last few years the phenomenon of exile has been capturing the attention of researchers throughout the world. For instance,

Amit Shankar Saha, a researcher wrote a scholarly article, *Exile literature and the Diasporic Indian writer* (2009) published in Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities, Calcutta University which exemplifies through John Simpson's *The Oxford Book of Exile* (1995), the various forms of exiles. The article goes on to show how diasporic Indian writing is in some sense a part of exile literature. By showing the examples of writers both from old Indian diaspora of indentured labourers and the modern Indian diaspora of IT technocrats, it shows that despite peculiarities, there is an exilic state, inherent in all the dislocated lives whether, voluntary or involuntary forced migration. Exile is one subject that has engaged the imagination of many writers in the course of literary history like Martin Tucker, Dr. Celeste M. Schenck and Edward W. Said; who have written about the general characteristics and implications of exile. Dr. Celeste M. Schenck is the president of The American University of Paris who in her article, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy* (1986) published by University of Tulsa focuses on displacement experienced by women writers in exile while Said talks from his personal experience as a Palestinian. He emphasizes on the personal and the literary repercussions of exile. Many works have been done in fictions. For instance, Samuel Lyndon Gladden has discussed the writings of Oscar Wilde *The Ballod of Reading Gaol* (1898) following the completion of his prison sentence and move to France, Joseph Conrad's experience as a Pole living in England is written by Leo Gurko and Richard S. Kennedy. It has focused on F. Scott Fitzgerald's *Tender is the Night* (1934) which reflects Fitzgerald's self-exile in France. Sometimes, in order to seek personal as well as artistic freedom, nation's leading intellectuals and writers go on self-exile. This happened in Germany during and Post World War II, when many anti- Nazi writers left the country in protest (as self-exiles) and created

a parallel body of German literature written outside Germany. Gunter Berghaus has written about the life of writers living outside Germany noting their contribution to the intellectual life in their new environment. Mr. Datta G. Sawant's research paper, *Narration of Self-Imposed Exile in Bhalchandra Nemade's The Hindu: A Prosperous Obstruction of Living* (2010) talks about the theme of exile which influenced the native literatures like Nemande's *The Hindu* marking out many postcolonial issues indulged into the native ones. It talks about how the protagonist of the novel- Khanderao becomes the victim of exile.

Nico Israel, in her book *Outlandish: Writings between Exile and Diaspora* (2000) says that exile and disapora, each contain a 'curious contradiction'. Israel continues to say that on one hand, exile indicates banishment from a particular place is an act of force whereas diaspora is the dispersal of a body of people from their traditional home across foreign lands, it is like an agricultural sowing of seeds and suggests an anticipation of root-taking and eventual growth.

The survey reveals the very fact that no major, acclaimed work has been carried out on any of the works of Kashmiri Pandits, treated as 'exile narratives' in the proposed research work. The proposed thesis would focus on the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1991 within Said's theoretical framework. Exile in the context of Kshmiri Pandits still requires interpretation and analysis from holistic perspective. Apart from unearthing the socio-political implications of 'exile narratives' of Kashmiri Pandits, the research would explore the relationship between 'art and trauma' with reference to the renowned American critic Edmund Wilson's thesis of 'Wound and the Bow' (1961). Wilson relates literary genius with the trauma experienced by the writer. He postulated the notion of inseparability of "superior strength from disability" (257) through the myth of Philoctetes, the Greek archer

who suffered from a malodorous wound. In the context of Kashmiri Pandits, it is the wound of forced separation from their motherland which never heals. This psychological perspective would supplement the socio-political interpretive framework of Edward Said, thus widening the scope of research. Such an all- inclusive analysis of the 'exile narratives' of Kashmiri Pandits would open up new vistas of further research in literature as also life. Most of the existing study on the writings of Kashmiri Pandits is in a scattered form (in the form of scholarly articles) but an exhaustive research work has not been attempted so far. In the proposed thesis, important exiled writers of Kashmir would be placed on one platform, to generate a complete vision of their literature which is primarily exile literature. The selected works are not confined to one specific genre, thus further providing a wider scope to analyze the reflection of trauma in different literary forms. In an attempt to further broaden the scope of research, the research would interview selected Kashmiri writers to explore the theme of art and trauma with greater authenticity. The selected narratives of Kashmiri Pandits examine the disruption of everyday life in Kashmir in the years of the region's pervasive militarization in 1990-91. They are powerful and emotional narratives of Kashmiri Pandits longing to get back to their native land. The strength of all the narratives lie in the description of the torn lives of Kashmiri Pandits.

The objectives of the proposed study would be:

1. To theorize exile, displacement and cultural alienation within postcolonial studies in general and Edward Said's Theory of Exile in particular

2. To explore and examine the socio –political forces underlying India- Pakistan Partition resulting in fractured lives

3. To situate the selected narratives of Kashmiri Pandits within Edward Said's theory of exile.

4. To analyze the relationship between 'art and trauma' in the selected exile narratives with reference to Edmund Wilson's Wound and the Bow theory

5. To attempt a stylistic analysis of selected works.

6. To bring out cross-cultural perspective by juxtaposing the exilic conditions of Palestinians and Kashmiris.

In the light of the above mentioned objectives, the chapter scheme of the proposed thesis would be:

1. Dislocation and Exile of Kashmiri Pandits: A Historical perspective

2. Theorizing displacement: Edward Said's Theory of Exile

3. The Burning Paradise: A Study of Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude*, Dhar's *Under the Shadow of Militancy: The Diary of an Unknown Kashmiri* and Pandita's *Our Moon has Blood Clots*

4. A Desolate State: A Study of Chowdhary's *Faith and Frenzy*, Kaul's *Of Gardens and Graves* and Gigoo, Ajit and Singh's *From Home to House*

5. Exile Narratives' and Wilson's Wound and the Bow Thesis: An Exploratory study of Art and trauma

6. Rhetoric of Exile: A Stylistic Analysis

7. Conclusion

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